

March 6, 1968

Mr. William Kirk Stuckey
Northwestern University
Crown Administration Center
Evanston, Illinois 60201

Dear Mr. Stuckey:

As one writer to another, I very much appreciate your interest in my articles. They are, by the way, now available in the Madison, Wisconsin Capitol Times-- this is at least the nearest to Chicago that I have been able to have them adopted.

As for an interview, I would have to say that frankly that one of my motives in writing a column is the opportunity that it gives me to express myself directly without suffering the hazards of selection and interpretation by others. I would therefore prefer to reserve the opportunity to speak for myself on many of the questions you have raised, rather than via an interview.

However, if you would be interested in an informal discussion without attribution, I will be happy to comment on some of the questions you raised.

Meantime, perhaps I can deal with some of them right now, off the record. I also enclose some of my writings that may have a particular pertinence to your questions.

1. For anyone to answer such a question honestly would require a psychiatric interview. You will, however, find some remarks on the question among the enclosed material.
2. A scientist can express his own critical judgments about scientific matters. Without exceptional training the science-newswriters are confined to reporting what other people say and do.
3. I am not sure what you mean by a failure. I don't know how interesting many "failures" would be; but I would certainly not set any different standard for discussion in public media that I would for a professional journal. The one further remark I would make about that is that new scientific results should not be announced to the press before their publication in scientific journals. The reason for this is not professionalism, but to be sure that the scientific community has sufficient data for critical rebuttal at least coincidentally with public release. Otherwise, claims that have no hope of being substantiated can achieve wide and irrevocable currency through public advertisement.

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4. I am not sure I totally understand this question. Peter Medawar has written a delightful book on the realities of the scientific method that you want to see. I think it is called "The Art of the Soluble". I don't see any different standards of propriety for discussion about scientific work and scientific workers than exist in other fields. But I think, as for example with Jim Watson's book, one might also want to discuss the methods and motivations of the commentator. When a scientist has confined his exposure to the public to his scientific writings, I don't think he has waived his privacy with respect to his personal affairs, and ordinary standards of privacy should prevail. Scientists who go out of the way to become public figures necessarily expose themselves to a higher level of public curiosity.

However, I just don't see the possibility of reaching firm conclusions about the methods and motivations of a scientist "in the same critical manner.....". Very often the least reliable witness on such a question would be the worker himself.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

Enclosures: Science & Man columns

Other material to be sent separately

P.S. May I also refer you to the remarks by Professor Tiselius on the occasion of the presentation of the Nobel Prizes in 1964. They appear in "Les Prix Nobel" for that year.